



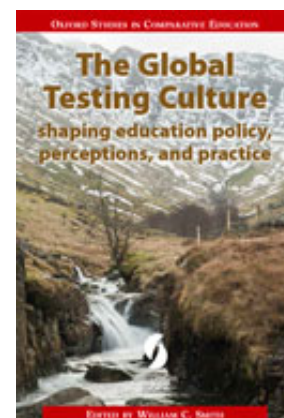
OXFORD STUDIES IN COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

The Global Testing Culture shaping education policy, perceptions, and practice

Edited by WILLIAM C. SMITH

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About the book

The past thirty years have seen a rapid expansion of testing, exposing students worldwide to tests that are now, more than ever, standardized and linked to high-stakes outcomes. The use of testing as a policy tool has been legitimized within international educational development to measure education quality in the vast majority of countries worldwide. The embedded nature and normative power of high-stakes standardized testing across national contexts can be understood as a global testing culture. The global testing culture permeates all aspects of education, from financing, to parental involvement, to teacher and student beliefs and practices. The reinforcing nature of the global testing culture leads to an environment where testing becomes synonymous with accountability, which becomes synonymous with education quality.

Underlying the global testing culture is a set of values identified from the increasing literature on world culture. These include: education as a human right, academic intelligence, faith in science, decentralization, and neoliberalism. Each of these values highlights different aspects of the dialogue in support of high-stakes standardized testing. The wide approval of these values and their ability to legitimate various aspects of high-stakes testing reinforces the taken-for-granted notion that such tests are effective and appropriate education practices. However, a large body of literature emphasizes the negative unintended consequences – teaching to the test, reshaping the testing pool, the inequitable distribution of school resources and teachers' attention, and reconstructing the role of the student, teacher, and parent – commonly found when standardized, census-based tests are combined with high-stakes outcomes for educators or students.

This book problematizes this culture by providing critical perspectives that challenge the assumptions of the culture and describe how the culture manifests in national contexts. The volume makes it clear that testing, per se, is not the problem. Instead it is how tests are administered, used or misused, and linked to accountability that provide the global testing culture with its powerful ability to shape schools and society and lead to its unintended, undesirable consequences.

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